Since March, the Sangamon County Department of Public Health and local healthcare providers have partnered to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. Almost 4,000 Sangamon County residents, roughly 2% of the county’s population, have contracted COVID-19. Infections have ranged from asymptomatic to fatal. Many individuals who have contracted the infection are also at a great risk of suffering from lingering symptoms of post-viral syndromes.

Now we are fighting the much feared “next wave” of the illness. Other regions of our state have had to implement additional mitigation measures, such as a ban on indoor service at bars and restaurants, after their positivity rates rose past 8% and remained there for several days. If COVID-19 continues to spread rapidly in these areas, they will face additional restrictions on businesses and activities to protect the ability of hospitals, urgent care centers and medical offices to care for patients.

Region 3, which includes Sangamon, is strikingly close to additional mitigations, but actions by the public can help avert the consequences other areas have faced. Everyone can help stop the spread and bring down the case counts. Residents of the County responded in May and June by focusing on mitigation efforts and did shut down the spread of this virus; working together, we need to refocus and do it again. As colder weather settles in the area, everyone needs to think carefully about the risks associated with social gatherings. Everyone can help slow and stop the spread of COVID-19 by wearing face coverings, keeping physical distance and regularly washing your hands.
The CDC indicates that nearly half of all people with COVID-19 don’t show symptoms. By wearing a face covering, you protect those around you.

Currently, the number of residents testing positive is climbing and is continuing to do so. The efforts Sangamon County took to suppress the spread or “flatten the curve” allowed time for the health care community to gird itself for this surge, and the health care system is currently handling the situation. The healthcare providers offer safe and capable settings where anyone needing healthcare of any kind should seek care when needed. However, with the increasing numbers, the community needs to do its part again to prevent the situation from worsening to greater levels.

For everyone to practice now-familiar public health measures is essential to reducing infections, which reduces serious illness that many people experience. Homemade and cloth masks are widely available and have been shown to prevent virus transmission. Critically, persons that are not sick or feeling symptoms need to wear masks in public because while they may not feel sick at all, they may be unwittingly spreading the virus. Physically distancing reduces transmission and also likely reduces the number of unknown contacts who may have been exposed to the virus. Hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections. You can spread certain "germs" (a general term for microbes like viruses and bacteria) casually by touching another person. You can also catch germs when you touch contaminated objects or surfaces and then you touch your face (mouth, eyes, and nose).

The more people an individual interacts with at a gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and COVID-19 spreading.
The higher the level of community transmission in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering. Even medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart are risky for transmission. Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart carry great risk. Risks increase significantly if attendees at any event are traveling from outside the local area.

These simple measures can stop the pandemic from disrupting so many lives, from pushing the hospitals/health care systems and from worsening the economic hardship this pandemic has produced.